
MANGROVES OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA:

IDENTIFICATION and TRADITIONAL USE

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EXTRACT: *Aegiceras* (pp. 44–46)

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DARWIN 2006

Aegiceras

MYRSINACEAE

DERIVATION: The Greek 'aix' means goat, and 'keras' means horn, this refers to the fruit's resemblance to the horn of a goat.

A genus of two species; *A. corniculatum* occurs in tropical Australia, including NT tidal areas.

***Aegiceras corniculatum* (L.) Blanco**

River Mangrove

DERIVATION: The Latin 'corniculatus' means curved like a horn, and refers to the curved fruit of this species.

DESCRIPTION: Shrub or small tree to 5 m; viviparous; bark smooth, grey-brown. Leaves alternate, petiole 15 mm; lamina obovate-elliptic, 4–8 x 1.8–3.4 cm, discolorous; apex broadly obtuse, base cuneate. Inflorescence axillary and terminal umbels, peduncles short or absent, pedicel 9 mm. Flowers 5-partite. Sepals obtuse, 5 mm long, stiffly convolute. Corolla white, tube to 5 mm, throat tomentose, lobes reflexed, acute, 5 mm long. Stamens united into short tube clothed with glandular hairs, inserted on corolla tube; filaments 4 mm; anthers 3 mm, sagitate. Ovary superior, unilocular, ovule one; style 6 m long, tapering from broad base, patterned with dark spots. Fruit cylindrical, curved, 38 x 6 mm, becoming pink when ripe, apex acute.

HABITAT: *Aegiceras corniculatum* is tolerant of a wide range of salinity, soil and light regimes, and as a consequence it is found in a variety of tidal environments. It most commonly occurs along the landward margins of coastal mangals and the waters edge of seasonally brackish waterways. Associates include *Avicennia marina*, *Camptostemon schultzii* and *Aegialitis annulata*.

DISTRIBUTION: *Aegiceras corniculatum* occurs commonly around the entire NT coast, extending its range to Western Australia and through Queensland to New South Wales. Extra-Australian localities include New Guinea, India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Java and South China.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES: Leaves alternate, elliptic, often coated in salt; flowers white, strong sweet scent; fruit curved, pointed, becoming pink when ripe.

ETHNOBOTANY: Emi and Batjamal people place leafy twigs over hot coals to produce smoke, in which babies are held to make them physically and spiritually 'strong' (Smith & Wightman 1990). The wood is used to make implements such as axe handles and digging sticks.

Rirratjingu people observe that native bees visit the flowers to obtain nectar and pollen, and the salt-coated leaves are used as flavouring when cooking meat (Yunupingu et al. 1995).

Tiwi people note that the honey made by native bees from the pollen and nectar of this plant is very sweet (Puruntatameri et al. 2001). Ngaliwurru and Jaminjung people have no specific use for this plant and the name can be used for mangroves in general (Wightman pers. obs.).

Recorded Aboriginal language names

Balabala (Kunwinjku)	Bitjining (Rirratjingu, Yolngu matha)
Derra (Emi)	Mundurkmundurrk (Djambarrpuyngu)
Wakuranganing (Djambarrpuyngu)	Wakuranganing (Yolngu Matha)
Mijinga (Tiwi)	Mammurru (Jaminjung, Ngaliwurru)
Wulanda (Yanyuwa)	

The use of *A. corniculatum* as a source of oyster stakes and as a source of salt has been reported (Cribb & Cribb 1981) in Australia, but no location is given. A decoction of leaves is used as a remedy for ear-ache by female (only) Aboriginals in Queensland (Lassak & McCarthy 1983). The flowers are a major honey source in Queensland (Jones 1971).

The light coloured, easily worked wood of *A. corniculatum* is used to build huts and as firewood in India (Maiden 1889). In Vietnam the timber is an important source of fuel-wood for domestic use (Hong & San 1993); the roots can be used as fish poison. In China this species is an important source of nectar (Chang & Peng 1987). The wood is used to make fences and the leaves are used as goat fodder in Sumba, Indonesia (Astuti et al. 2001).

NOTES: *Aegiceras corniculatum* produces flowers during May–October, the sweet smell associated with the flowers suggests bee pollination. Fruits mature from December to March.

Saenger (1982) suggests the embryos only pierce the pericarp after the fruit has fallen and the plant is not strictly viviparous. The propagule is suited to water dispersal via its inherent buoyancy, Clarke and Hannon (1970) found that *A. corniculatum* fruit fall coincided with unusually high tides.

Populations in the north Kimberley (pers. obs.), Western Australia, with distinctly smaller leaves and reduced stature may represent the poorly known *Aegiceras floridum* Roemer & Schultes, which has not been previously recorded from Australia (Tomlinson 1986). *A. floridum* occurs in the eastern Indonesian Maluku province, where it is 'scattered and scarce' (Backer & Bakhuizen, 1965). However, further fertile collections from more populations in north Australia are required to confidently compare the taxa to each other.

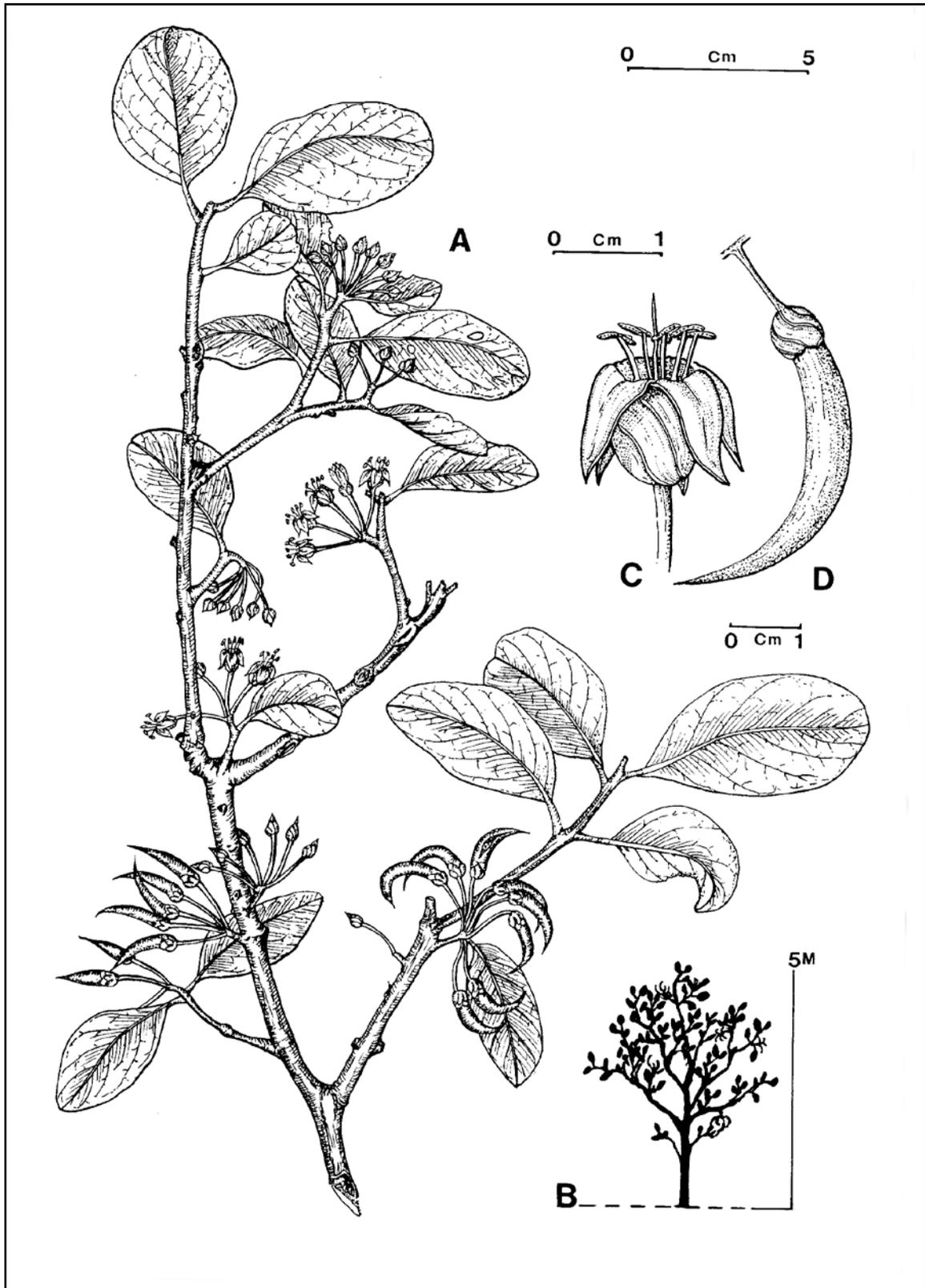


Figure 12. *Aegiceras corniculatum*. A, flowering and fruiting branch; B, habit; C, flower; D, fruit (A, G. Wightman 2451, DNA; C, G. Wightman 3307, DNA; D, G. Wightman 2350, DNA).